

BETTY SMITH

IBLA 82-801

Decided June 17, 1982

Appeal from decision of the Idaho State Office, Bureau of Land Management, declaring unpatented mining claims abandoned and void. I MC 34937 through I MC 34942.

Affirmed.

1. Administrative Procedure: Burden of Proof -- Evidence: Burden of Proof -- Evidence: Presumptions -- Evidence: Sufficiency -- Mining Claims: Abandonment

There is an established legal presumption, which is rebuttable, that official acts of public officers are regular. On the other hand, there is the presumption that mail properly addressed and with adequate postage affixed and deposited in an appropriate receptacle, is duly delivered. When these two presumptions come into conflict and BLM states that it did not receive the instrument, the burden is on the one asserting that it was received to show that it was, in fact, received timely by BLM. Appellant in this case has not carried her burden of proof by showing that BLM received the documents.

2. Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976: Recordation of Affidavit of Assessment Work or Notice of Intention to Hold Mining Claim -- Mining Claims: Recordation

Under sec. 314 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, 43 U.S.C. § 1744 (1976), the owner of a mining claim located on or before Oct. 21, 1976, must file a notice of intention to hold or evidence of performance of annual assessment work on the claim on or before

Oct. 22, 1979, and prior to Dec. 31 of each year thereafter. This requirement is mandatory and failure to comply is deemed conclusively to constitute abandonment of the claim by the owner and renders the claim void.

3. Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976: Recordation of Mining Claims and Abandonment -- Mining Claims: Abandonment

The conclusive presumption of abandonment which attends the failure to file an instrument required by 43 U.S.C. § 1744 (1976), is imposed by the statute itself. A matter of law, the conclusive presumption is self-operative and does not depend upon any act or decision of an administrative official. In enacting the statute, Congress did not invest the Secretary with authority to waive or excuse noncompliance with the statute, or to afford claimants any relief from the statutory consequences.

APPEARANCES: Betty Smith, pro se.

OPINION BY ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE HENRIQUES

Betty Smith appeals the Idaho State Office, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) decision of April 6, 1982, which declared the unpatented Gomad #3 through Gomad #8 lode mining claims, I MC 34937 through I MC 34942, abandoned and void because no proof of labor or notice of intention to hold the claims was received by BLM in 1980 as required by section 314 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), 43 U.S.C. § 1744 (1976), and 43 CFR 3833.2-1.

Appellant asserts the laws have been complied with since the claims were located in 1969. Appellant contends the 1980 proof of labor was sent to BLM, and that BLM either lost or misplaced the document, or it was lost in the mail. Appellant argues that BLM should check the records of Bonner County, in Sandpoint, Idaho, where she has filed a proof of labor every year since 1969. A copy of the 1980 proof of labor, recorded in Bonner County, Idaho, August 28, 1980, was submitted with the appeal.

[1] There are various presumptions which come into play when an appellant alleges timely transmittal of an instrument but BLM has no record of its receipt. On one hand, there is a presumption of regularity which supports the official acts of public officers in the proper discharge of their duties. See e.g., Legille v. Dann, 544 F.2d 1 (D.C. Cir. 1976); Bernard S. Storper, 60 IBLA 67 (1981); Phillips Petroleum Co., 38 IBLA 344 (1979). On the other hand, there is the presumption that mail properly addressed and with adequate

postage affixed, and deposited in an appropriate receptacle, is duly delivered. See e.g., Donald E. Jordan, 35 IBLA 290 (1978). When these two presumptions have come into conflict, the Board has generally accorded greater weight to the former. See David F. Owen, 31 IBLA 24 (1977). We believe that public policy considerations dictate that greater weight be given to the presumption of regularity over that accorded the presumption that mail, duly addressed, stamped, and deposited, is delivered.

Thus, where, after a thorough search, BLM states it did not receive the instrument, the burden is on the appellant to show that the instrument was, in fact, received timely by BLM. See H. S. Rademacher, 58 IBLA 152, 88 I.D. 873 (1981).

Appellant's unsupported statement that she did transmit the 1980 proof of labor to BLM does not overcome the presumption of regularity. It is the receipt of the instrument which is critical, and a document is not filed until it is received. See 43 CFR 1821.2-2(f).

[2] Section 314 of FLPMA requires the owner of unpatented mining claims located prior to October 21, 1976, in addition to filing with BLM a copy of the official record of the notice of location, to file with BLM evidence of the assessment work performed on the claim or a notice of intention to hold the claim within 3 years after the date of the Act, i.e., on or before October 22, 1979, and before December 31 of each calendar year thereafter. The statute also provides that failure to file such instruments within the time periods prescribed shall be deemed conclusively to constitute an abandonment of the mining claim by the owner. 43 CFR 3833.1-2, 3833.2-1, and 3833.4.

[3] Failure to comply with these requirements is conclusively deemed to constitute an abandonment of the claim by the owner and renders the claim void. Lawrence Paul, 63 IBLA 275 (1982); Lynn Keith, 53 IBLA 192, 88 I.D. 369 (1981); 43 U.S.C. § 1744(c) (1976), and 43 CFR 3833.4(a). Congress imposed that consequence in enacting FLPMA. The responsibility for complying with the recordation requirements of FLPMA rests with appellant, and this Board has no authority to excuse failure to comply with the statutory requirements of recordation or to afford any relief from the statutory consequences. As the Board stated in Lynn Keith, supra:

The conclusive presumption of abandonment which attends the failure to file an instrument required by 43 U.S.C. § 1744 (1976) is imposed by the statute itself, and would operate even without the regulations. See Northwest Citizens for Wilderness Mining Co., Inc. v. Bureau of Land Management, Civ. No. 78-46 (D. Mont. June 19, 1979). A matter of law, the conclusive presumption is self-operative and does not depend upon any act or decision of an administrative official. In enacting the statute, Congress did not invest the Secretary of the Interior with authority to waive or excuse noncompliance with the statute, or to afford claimants any relief from the statutory consequences. Thomas F. Byron, 52 IBLA 49 (1981).

53 IBLA at 196, 88 I.D. at 371-72.

Therefore, BLM properly declared appellant's mining claims abandoned and void in the absence of proof that evidence of assessment work was filed with BLM prior to December 31, 1980, pursuant to FLPMA, supra, and 43 CFR 3833.2-1.

Accordingly, pursuant to the authority delegated to the Board of Land Appeals by Secretary of the Interior, 43 CFR 4.1, the decision appealed from is affirmed.

Douglas E. Henriques
Administrative Judge

We concur:

Bernard V. Parrette
Chief Administrative Judge

Gail M. Frazier
Administrative Judge

